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Consultant Said He Got Carter Papers, GOP Aide Tells FBI

By Martin Schram and Bob Woodward
Washington Post Staff Writers

A Republican congressional aide has told the FBI that Paul Corbin, a political consultant with old-line Kennedy connections, claimed last spring that he had obtained President Carter's briefing papers for the 1980 presidential debate and had given them to Ronald Reagan's campaign manager, William J. Casey.

Tim Wyngaard, executive director of the House Republican Policy Committee, has told FBI investigators that Corbin made that claim to him in a telephone conversation last April—about six weeks before the debate papers controversy became public.

Casey emphatically denied in an interview this week that he had received any Carter debate briefing material from Corbin or anyone else. "I never knew this material was in the campaign," said Casey, who is the director of the CIA. "... It's totally false," Casey added.

Casey said confusion about Corbin may have arisen because Corbin did provide Casey with a six-page memo from a New York lawyer outlining possible statements Reagan might make in the October, 1980, debate with Carter in Cleveland.

Casey said he is a friend of Corbin's and authorized the Reagan-Bush Committee to pay Corbin \$2,860 for expenses for what Casey said was routine campaign work in Florida in the fall of 1980.

Officials involved in the FBI investigation of how Carter campaign papers came into the possession of the Reagan campaign view Wyngaard's version of the Corbin conversation as potentially significant because it is the first evidence that someone voiced knowledge about the Carter debate papers before the episode was first mentioned in the media. One investigative source cautioned, however, that its accuracy may turn out to be "unprovable."

Corbin declined to respond to reporters' inquiries. But associates of his said he denies ever obtaining the Carter briefing papers or making such a claim to Wyngaard.

Corbin's alleged claim to the congressional aide has been known to the White House since last June, and has figured in the dispute between Casey and White House chief of staff James A. Baker III over which top Reagan campaign official first received the Carter briefing papers. Baker says he got the Carter papers from Casey; Casey says he never saw them.

On June 24, Corbin's alleged claim was relayed to Baker by Wyngaard's boss, Republican Policy Committee Chairman Dick Cheney (R-Wyo.). Baker then discussed it with Casey.

After his discussion with Baker, Casey told a middle-level White House official who is also a confidant that he was considering changing his original denial that he had never received the Carter debate documents, according to one reliable account.

This Casey confidant said that Casey told him he recalled receiving something from Corbin during the campaign and could not recall if it was the voluminous Carter debate papers.

Casey has given this account of how he went about determining that his denial should stand.

As the White House began its own internal inquiry into the matter in June, Casey told White House counsel Fred F. Fielding that Corbin could have provided him with some Carter debate papers.

Casey called Charles Bartlett, a former Washington columnist who had introduced Casey and Corbin, to see if Bartlett had any idea of what Corbin had provided the Reagan campaign. Bartlett reportedly did not. At that point Casey tried to find Corbin, and finally reached him by telephone on June 29 while Corbin was vacationing in Aruba.

In that call—according to accounts made public afterward by Casey and Corbin—Corbin said the only information or material he had provided to Casey was a few pages of material from New York attorney Adam Walinsky, former top adviser to the late Sen. Robert F. Kennedy (D-N.Y.).

After the talk with Corbin, and after Casey found the Walinsky material, Casey said he was convinced that he had fully and accurately stated his recollection.

Though the Walinsky material previously has been referred to in newspaper accounts as a speech, it is a memo recommending points Reagan might use in debating Carter, including an attack on what Walinsky called "President's Carter's many disasters." Unlike the 1,000-page Carter debate papers, it is a slim, six-page memo that is addressed to Corbin and begins "Dear Paul."

Investigative sources said Corbin also had sent the Walinsky memo to Baker, who was running the debate preparation group in the Reagan campaign. Baker also knew Corbin. Bartlett has said he had introduced them.

Baker declined to comment this week about the matter.

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